The Destroyer

1 Corinthians 10:10

6Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 7And do not become idolaters as *were* some of them. As it is written, *“The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.”* 8Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; 9nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; 10nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

My interest here is verse 10 where we find a word that is a hapax legomenon, or a word with only 1 occurrence in the New Testament. “Destroyer” should be capitalized in the translation, as it appears that Paul has a specific being in mind as he reviews a variety of historical events in the Old Testament. The Greek word for “destroyer” is “olothreutes,” pronounced olo-threw-tase. The first reference to this being is in Exodus 12:23 where this being is also called “the destroyer” which is translating a noun with the definite article. The Septuagint uses a participle to translate this as “the one who is destroying.” Hebrews 11:28 follows the Septuagint and uses a participle “in order that the one who is destroying should touch them,” also referring to the Passover. From Exodus 12 we can establish the existence of a being who passed through Egypt and killed the firstborn in every house without blood on the doorposts.

In 2 Samuel 24:15-17 an angel is destroying 70,000 men due to David’s sin of numbering the people. This “plague” (2 Sam. 24:15) was an angel of the Lord (this is probably not a preincarnate appearance of Christ because the article is not used consistently and the context argues against it). It seems that this is also The Destroyer.

In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul states that the destroyer did his work because the people complained. Israel complained a lot, but Numbers 16 is the best candidate for what Paul had in mind. Korah’s rebellion hits all of the required elements. Complaining gave rise to rebellion. Led by Korah, a descendent of Levi, several of the tribe of Ruben, and 250 leaders from all of the tribes decided that Moses and Aaron should share the leadership. When asked to appear before the Tabernacle, they refused; the grounded opened up and swallowed the tents of folks in two different tribes. The western part of Utah has this sort of deep, ragged, cracks that run where the wish; these cracks, however, closed once they devoured the complaining rebels. Then fire came out from the Tabernacle and tracked down each of the 250 leaders and killed them. The next day the people complained that it was Moses’s fault these folks died. God sent a plague, probably The Destroyer. Moses and Aaron saw what was happening, Aaron ran and took fie from the altar, put incense on it and ran into the congregation and stood between the living and the dead. The Destroyer stopped, but not before 14,700 people were killed, not counting the ones already killed by the devouring crack.

Stop complaining. It’s hazardous to your health.